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ABSTRACT

A study measured attitudes towards Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) victims by providing a qualitative content analysis of newspaper coverage of the epidemic. A search of the NEXIS database was conducted to identify every "New York Times" article on the subject of AIDS in which the word "innocent" appears. Results revealed the following categories of "innocent AIDS victims": (1) the "non-members," victims who are innocent by dint of their not being a drug addict, or not gay, or not an adult; (2) the "innocent by intention," composed of HIV-positive individuals who would not knowingly spread the virus to others, and HIV-negative individuals who intend to retain that status; and (3) the "unjaded" innocents, not yet exposed to the demands of contemporary urban life, or more narrowly to the intricacies of the gay male subculture. Studies like these illustrate the usefulness of database searching for the academic researcher. (Fifty-eight references are included.) (Author/PRA)

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Who are the "innocent victims?" Using NEXIS to track the *New York Times'* coverage of AIDS

by

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ABSTRACT

A NEXIS search was conducted to identify every *New York Times* article on the subject of AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) in which the word "innocent" appears. The following categories of "innocent AIDS victims" emerged: (1) the "non-members," victims who are innocent by dint of their not being a drug addict, or not gay, or not an adult; (2) the "innocent by intention," composed of HIV-positive individuals who would not knowingly spread the virus to others, and HIV-negative individuals who intend to retain that status; and (3) the "unjaded" innocents, not yet exposed to the demands of contemporary urban life, or more narrowly to the intricacies of the gay male subculture.

In a time of fiscal austerity, when dollars for AIDS research and treatment can be augmented only if other health budget (or general budget) items are reduced, it makes sense to find multiple means of gauging societal attitudes towards AIDS and towards PWAs. Direct polling of the plebescite is often done; some experimental social psychological research has been conducted, as has discourse analysis of conversations between romantic partners negotiating safer sex. The purpose of this paper is to gauge attitudes towards AIDS victims by providing a qualitative content analysis of newspaper coverage of the epidemic. Of particular interest are stories in which the word "innocent" appears in an AIDS story.[1] The NEXIS database, operated by Mead Data Central of Dayton, Ohio, was used.

In this initial attempt at examining the "innocent" AIDS victims, I have restricted myself to articles that appeared in the *New York Times*. This limited scope was determined by the sheer volume of articles identified in my NEXIS search when other media were added (over 10,000 when the entire NEXIS library was searched), and to the fact that the *Times* is one of the few media outlets for which NEXIS' memory dates back far enough to examine coverage of the very beginning of AIDS in America. A total of 905 stories were identified. Of these, only 56 used the word "innocent" in a story that dealt in some way with the AIDS crisis. These stories have been categorized according to the attribution of "innocence."[2]

The first group of innocents are so described by dint of their "*non- group membership*" status. They are "non-gay" or "non-addict" or, in the case of children, "non-adult." A second group of innocents are deemed such on the basis of their presumed

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[1]The specific search strategy used for this initial study was "(AIDS or ((Gay and Cancer) or (GRID))) and Innocen!)" Such a search strategy would not only call up articles in which the words "innocent" (or "innocence") and "AIDS" appeared, but would also find articles predating the coining of the phrase, "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome." Initially, AIDS was discovered in this country when physicians on the east and west coasts noticed rare cancers, such as Kaposi's Sarcoma, appearing in young gay males (Altman, 1981). The acronym "GRID," or "gay related immune deficiency," was the term of art for a time. Surprisingly, there were no articles in which the word "innocent" appeared with "GRID" or with "Gay" *and* "cancer."

[2]A tiny number of articles used the word "innocent" while talking about AIDS, but not while talking about different categories of victims. Thus, Leishman (1986) reviews a book whose author predicts that the real cause of AIDS will eventually be found to be as "innocent" as a drinking well that can spread disease; innocent here seems to mean simple and easily eradicated. Similarly, Passer (1986) reminds us that such "innocent" activities as getting a tattoo and receiving acupuncture treatment can spread the AIDS virus. The full context of his letter to the editor would suggest that "innocent" for him seems to mean surprising, or counter-intuitive, rather than "not of or relating to sex or drugs".

intentions vis-a-vis the disease [either not intending to infect others, or intending to remain uninfected]. A third category of articles finds the word "innocent" used in a more generic way, as if to suggest "not yet jaded" [either by the gay subculture, or by modern life generally]. The body of this paper will be organized so as to explore each of these categories in turn. A brief concluding section will also be offered, which will assess the *Times*' use of the word "innocent" in writing about AIDS, and will also offer some tentative suggestions for using NEXIS to explore other media's handling of the epidemic.

Throughout the remainder of this paper, I will adopt the convention of underlining the word innocent as it appears in direct quotes from the articles identified by NEXIS. Underscoring here will not suggest the original author's intended emphasis, but will save us the trouble of repeating the phrase, "emphasis added" dozens of times.

I. The "NON" members

While both "political correctness" and sound public health policy dictate that the spread of AIDS is most likely to be contained if we think in terms of risk *behaviors* rather than risk *groups*, for quite some time the media reported that those at most risk were members of the "4 H" groups--homosexuals, heroin addicts, hemophiliacs, and Haitians. It is no surprise, then, that many references to innocence are really indications of membership status.[3]

A. Anyone but gays and/or addicts

When the Southern Baptists convened in San Antonio in June of 1988, they passed a resolution condemning homosexuality as "a manifestation of a depraved nature" and "a

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[3]The "4 H" shorthand may have had some mnemonic utility, though even this is doubtful. Conspicuously absent are infants who contract the disease in the womb. And the key to transmission among addicts is not the drug of choice (heroin vs. crack cocaine vs. some other substance) but rather whether needles are shared with an infected person.

It should also be pointed out that at least a couple of "innocent" references were too vague to categorize according to specific membership status. An editorial condemning those who would not only deny addicts clean needles, but also bleach to clean their own needles, offers without explication that such a policy "could condemn many innocent people to death" (Murderous mischief, 1989). One gets the sense from the context that an innocent life is any that need not have been lost. Similarly, a review of the play, *Eastern Standard*, contrasts two kinds of people who wake up with night sweats--"guilty perpetrators of financial corruption" and "innocent victims of AIDS" (Rich, 1988). It would appear that all PWAs are innocent, at least for this writer.

perversion of divine standards" (Steinfels, 1988). That same resolution referred to homosexual activity as "the primary cause of the introduction and spread of AIDS in the United States," and added that AIDS infected not only homosexuals "but also many innocent victims."

Perhaps one of the more cryptic references to "innocent" victims occurred in the context of another religious conference, this one at the Vatican in the Fall of 1989. One of the participants lent credence to the notion, popularized by some fundamentalist clergy in America, that AIDS could be seen as God's wrath. This does not mean that homosexuals are being singled out, continued Rocco Buttiglione of the International Academy of Philosophy in Liechtenstein, in that all illnesses could be considered the wrath of God, even if they struck "innocent people" (Pope asks, 1989). This proposition is open to at least two equally plausible interpretations. First, the speaker may be cautioning us not to conclude from the disproportionate ratio of gay men who fall to AIDS that the disease has been specifically aimed at them by God as punishment for sin, that disease is not the same as guilt. But the phrase might also mean that the simple fact that *other, truly innocent* persons get AIDS in fairly large numbers is the evidence upon which Buttiglione relies.

At the other end of the gay rights political spectrum, it is no surprise when Robert Bernstein (listed in his by-line as Vice President of the Federation of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) calls upon the history of gays' treatment in America to express disgust, though not surprise, at a Texas judge who gave the murderer of two gay men a light sentence precisely because his victims were gay. "Like the purported witches of Salem," Bernstein writes, "gays are presumed by many to be evil sinners, capable of working their corrupt will on innocent others" (Bernstein, 1988).

Similarly, author David Leavitt shares with us the story of his atttendance at an American Booksellers of America convention, where the book *At Risk* was being hawked with much energy:[4]

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[4]Alice Hoffman's *At Risk* was also the subject of a book review identified by NEXIS. The reviewer takes Hoffman to task for trying too carefully to build sympathy for gays:

> The problem is that even though *At Risk* seems spontaneous and original, a reader never escapes the sense of a blueprint behind it. For instance, one is initially relieved that in the character of Amanda Farrell Ms. Hoffman has selected what in a narrow sense might be considered the most innocent

> This was going to be bad for us. After all, "At Risk" was the story of a child, one of the so-called "innocent" victims of AIDS whose stories--because they escape our society's prejudices against gay men and drug users--are deemed more palatable to a "general" audience. What made me nervous was the implication, inherent in the phrase, "innocent victim," that the majority of people with AIDS are "guilty" victims, who had brought the disease on themselves by engaging in homosexual sex or shooting drugs.[5] Wasn't it those people, after all, who had donated the tainted blood in the first place? Weren't they on some level responsible for the plight of the child, the children (Leavitt, 1989)?

If Leavitt's story is one of coming of age as a gay activist (he writes about his first ACT UP meeting), Shenson's is about his coming of age as a compassionate health care provider. He writes his op-ed piece from the perspective of a medical resident who makes a pilgrimage to a Louisiana leper colony, seeking parallels that will help him work through his own queasiness in dealing with AIDS patients. He seeks to combat in himself an attitude that suggests "the occasional young patient with cancer was somehow more tragic than his roommate with this equally fatal disease." He recognizes that much of what makes AIDS a "loathsome disease" is that some of the behaviors that may spread it are themselves,

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possible vicitm of AIDS. But no sooner does one begin to feel misgivings about this judgment, when Ivan, Amanda's father, calls an AIDS hotline, and through it meets Brian, a dying musician who has picked up the virus either from love making or shooting cocaine with an infected needle. The symmetry of Brian's presence in the story is a little too neat (Lehmann-Haupt, 1988).

[5]This sentiment is echoed in Michael Kimmelman's remarks about the TV movie, "The Ryan White Story." Producers of such films tend to "steer clear of explosive issues like gay rights or free needles for drug addicts" by using "innocent" AIDS victims instead (Kimmelman, 1989a). TV critic John O'Connor, in reviewing the TV movie, adds:

> Once again prime time television entertainment is approaching the subject of AIDS through the case of a hemophiliac youth infected through a transfusion of tainted blood. The vast majority of AIDS patients are homosexuals and drug addicts, but television apparently is not ready to explore these groups with any degree of compassion. Innocent youngsters trapped by circumstances beyond their control provide far easier dramatic hooks for uplift exercises (O'Connor, 1989a).

A few months later the showing of another TV movie--*The Littlest Victims*--prompted O'Connor to remark:

> Still wary of portraying homosexuals or drug addicts in any way that might be construed as sympathetic, prime-time television entertainment continues to tell the AIDS story through its most innocent carriers (O'Connor, 1989b).

independently, seen as loathsome. He emerges with the insight that "there are no 'victims,' because threre is no crime," that "there are no 'innocents,'" because there are no 'guilty'" (Shenson, 1988).[6]

It was the death of Republican Congressman Stewart McKinney from AIDS that led gay activist Jeff Levi to criticize those who seek to differentiate among categories of PWAs. Months after the death, several of McKinney's former associates began to approach the press to challenge the family's claim that McKinney had contracted AIDS from a blood transfusion. Their public statements were purportedly motivated by a desire to avoid misleading and frightening persons who may need a transfusion in the future. Levi offered this caveat:

> I don't think it's anyone's business whether Mr. McKinney was or was not a homosexual. There seems to be a subtle homophobia underlying all the curiosity, a suggestion that he would be somehow less innocent if he got the disease because he was a homosexual rather than a result of a transfusion (May, 1987).

B. Addicts' "collaterals"

When the history of the AIDS epidemic in America is written, it may try to explain why the perception of this disease as something gays give to non-gays did not lead to systematic persecution of gays is that substance abusers made an even more convenient and certainly a less powerful scapegoat.

Interestingly, the "innocent" label appears most frequently in this context when the advocate is in support of a policy--passing out free, clean needles on the street--that could

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[6]Yale University biology professor Alvin Novick echoes Shenson's remarks when he says (Weaver, 1987b):
> Our public officials and our leaders still speak of "innocent" victims, usually when they're referring to blood transfusion recipients. They imply by using the term "innocent" that there are guilty victims. If you ask them by what criterion they deem people to be guilty, I imagine they would say people who have sex.

otherwise be seen as supportive of the needs of substance abusers.[7] Yet the choice of wording often betrays strongly negative feelings about the addicts themselves. One letter writer supports this kind of government intervention "to reach those engaging in this practice, if only to protect innocent collaterals and their offspring" (Brambill, 1990). Another letter to the editor contrasts the closing of the gay bathhouses (which she supports) with the refusal to provide addicts with free needles:

> There can be no homosexual or bisexual man in the country today who is not aware that promiscuity exposes him to the risk of infection. His possible contagion must be regarded as voluntary. On the other hand, the infected addict exposes his innocent, unsuspecting female partner and any imminent offspring to the disease (Joyce, 1985).[8]

Another letter writer charges that

> Lost in the midst of this morality drama, that is, whether to supply addicts with "works," is the fate of many non-drug-using spouses and unborn children. To view this issue with little regard for the ever-widening gyre of collaterally infected humans is to sacrifice the lives of many innocents for political reasons (Maslansky, 1986).

One editorial offers, in a similar vein, that

> with a quarter of New York's addicts already likely to die from AIDS, a policy of doing nothing will permit the death of thousands more, as well as of their innocent partners and children (Can Clean Needles, 1986).

A second editorial supports the giving out of clean needles because "apart from keeping

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[7]One editorial dealt with the related proposal to loosen governmental regulations on methadone distribution. The premise offered was that in the foreseeable future the "panoply of counseling and social services" that should be offered along with methadone will not be, and that to simply make the drug freely available in the interim, as opposed to doing nothing, would be the lesser of two evils:

> AIDS vastly increases the lethal potential of heroin abuse to non-users as well as addicts themselves. Methadone treatment not only helps cure addiction; it helps save innocent lives (Breakthrough on methadone, 1989).

[8]The writer may be proving too much and too little, simultaneously. If gays are guilty (relatively speaking) because they know the risks involved, what of any woman who engages in heterosexual relations and contracts the virus? If the issue is one of a "reasonable expectation of cleanliness," what of the gay male who had reason to believe his lover had been monogamous for many years, but who had been deceived?

addicts alive, clean needles could spare the innocents whom the addicts infect--their partners and children" (Wade, 1988). Yet another praises those nations in Western Europe that have already instituted a "clean needles" policy, because by so doing they demonstrate their "wish to save both addicts and the innocents whom they infect" (Fighting AIDS, 1988).

C. The innocent children

Some children are drug addicts by choice; some are gay. The children referred to in this category of NEXIS citations are neither. Not surprisingly, children were often singled out as "innocent." This may not necessarily be a bad thing for the adult PWAs' plight. The fact that children also get AIDS, that there do exist the Ryan Whites of the world, makes it easier for politicians to support antidiscrimination ordinances (and research/treatment funding) to an extent that might not be otherwise possible. Thus, then presidential candidate Bush distanced himself from Reagan by openly espousing legislation to protect PWAs. In one news conference, he dramatically, if vaguely, exclaimed that he "abhors discrimination against innocent people" (Boyd, 1988). Most of candidate Bush's pronouncements on AIDS focused more narrowly on children as PWAs:[9]

> I 'd hate it if a kid of mine got a blood transfusion and my grandson had AIDS and the community discriminated against that child, that innocent child (Boyd, 1988).[10]

Concern for the children is what prompted Dr. Warren Andiman of Yale-New Haven Hospital to remark: "Infants and children are surely the most innocent victims of this epidemic, and plans need to be made now because there will be growing numbers of

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[9] In conversations with trusted associates, however, Bush was more willing to expand the scope of innocence (or at least of those whose needs warrant legislative intervention) so as to include those who have achieved the age of majority. Admiral James Watkins, who chaired the Presidential Commission on AIDS, said of Bush:

> I was very much persuaded by what he said when he talked about the needs of people in the workplace to be able to come forward, especially if this report endorses testing, and I think it does. . . They are not going to come forward if they think they are going to be thrown out of their jobs (Boyd, 1988).

[10] Part of David Leavitt's coming of age as a gay activist taught him to view such sentiments with suspicion:

> I saw what a short ride it was from the inflammatory rhetoric of fundamentalist Christians insisting that AIDS is divine retribution against homosexual sin, to the banal, but equally enraging voice of George Bush, declaring his compassion for people with AIDS, "especially the children." [Of course. How could he specify compassion for queers and junkies?] (Leavitt, 1989).

[infected] infants and children" (Weaver, 1987a).[11]

Concern for the children is also what produced the swing vote authorizing public schools in New York City to make condoms freely available to students. Dr. Westina Matthews of the Board of Education is described as having agonized over her decision:

> What she finally realized through spiritual contemplation, Dr. Matthews said, was that she must make her decision based on the possibility of saving the lives of innocent babies, many of them born to school-age mothers (Berger, 1991).

Some children get AIDS from blood transfusions. Others receive the virus because their mother was infected, and passed the virus on to them in utero. Of the latter group of children, some writers have suggested that their status as "innocent victims" stems from our society's failure to provide adequate medical care for poor people generally (see, e.g., French, 1989). It is relevant that the United Nations Declaration on Children says that the innocence of children is a function of their being "vulnerable and dependent," and that our failure to recognize and provide for this fact is what leads to the appalling statistic that each year "40,000 children die from malnutrition and disease, including AIDS" (World summit, 1990).

One well known member of the medical community goes so far as to suggest that babies destined to be born with a crack addiction or with AIDS are "innocent" because their "right" not to be born has been usurped (Calderone, 1989). This sentiment was also expressed by a high school student in Manhattan's George Washington High School, who after having seen a moving AIDS film depicting an infant born with the virus, cried out: "That's just an innocent child. She didn't ask to be brought into the world" (Iverem, 1987). In a slightly different context, a teenager who requested that the *New York Times* earmark her $36 contribution to the paper's needy children campaign to a child with AIDS explained her decision: "It isn't fair, is it, for a helpless, innocent child to come into this world doomed to an early and agonizing death" (Howe, 1988)?

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[11]Navarro (1989) quotes Ms. Emilia Santana, a different kind of healer, for the same point. Ms. Santana operates El Congo Real, a "botanica" or herbal medicine store frequented by the East Harlem Hispanic community. "This disease is terrible and it has to be stopped," Ms. Santana says. "Innocent people, children, are being infected."

Sometimes, concern for the children is expressed as a way of drawing lines. The addict is not innocent because he does drugs; his sex partner is not innocent, because, after all, she has sex. Only their children are innocent. The following is a typical statement: "In the great majority of cases the spread of the disease to heterosexuals, especially to women and their innocent children, can be traced to infected intravenous drug abusers" (Gurny, 1987). Also of relevance is one editorial writer who proposed that needles physically incapable of being used more than once should become the norm in the medical profession. To adopt this policy, he offered, is to ensure that "addicts, their consorts and their innocent unborn babies would be spared" (Zimmerman, 1989).

And finally, children are portrayed not only as the victims, but also as the inflictors of pain, in a poll that indicated most New York City school students are antigay, and that a large number approve of gay bashing. Anna Quindlen takes this jumping off point as her way of lamenting that no matter how positively she reviews Paul Monette's book, *Borrowed Time* (his account of caring for his lover as he died from AIDS), not enough of the people who need to read it and be swayed by it would do so:

> Doubtless some of this has to do with the disease that killed Roger Horwiz [Monette's lover], a disease that some people believe can pass through walls, scoot across backyards and infect innocents taking the sun in their strollers (Quindlen, 1988).

II. The role of intention and HIV status in innocence

There are two distinguishable but closely related genres of "innocent AIDS" references that comprise this category. First are those in which the dispositive factor is one's HIV status, pure and simple. HIV positive people are guilty because HIV negative people are innocent. The second genre applies the innocent label to otherwise "guilty" [HIV-positive] individuals who do not *knowingly* pass on the virus to others.

A. Innocent = not yet infected

Several references unearthed by NEXIS suggested that anyone not yet infected by

the AIDS virus was "innocent," which would seem to suggest that all PWAs and all HIV-positive individuals are guilty. More than one of the articles quoted Senator Jesse Helms, who has called for quarantining HIV-positive individuals. He is quoted as saying that "AIDS carriers would have to be identified or isolated to protect the innocent" (Bennett would detain, 1987).[12] Two days later, the *Times* editors expressed puzzlement at Helms' goal "to protect the people who are innocent": "Innocent? Of a disease? What would happen to the guilty, those who test positive for the AIDS virus?" (Senator Helms, 1987).

The implication that the difference between innocence and guilt lay in one's HIV status also emerged in those articles and opinion pieces arguing the merits of treating AIDS as a "communicable disease," with mandatory contact tracing and non-anonymous testing. Joseph Lisa, the chair of the New York City Council's AIDS subcommittee, favors such a policy. To delay testing and tracking "is to delay the inevitable and cause many more innocent people to be infected" (Lambert, 1987). Lisa attributed the status quo "to the political ramifications of the fact that, unfortunately, AIDS manifested itself here first and foremost in the male homosexual community." While the context is ambiguous, it is likely that Lisa says "unfortunately" as a way of attributing to gay males (at least in New York City) a level of political clout capable of preventing the implementation of a policy favored by Lisa.

On the other coast, the California legislature was considering a bill that would treat AIDS as a communicable disease, and require the reporting of all those who test positive to health authorities. Indicating his support of the proposed legislation, then-governor Deukmejian said, "Our only hope for protecting innocent lives is to stop its spread by treating AIDS like other communicable diseases" (Reinhold, 1988). Finally, a letter to the editor expressed support for contact tracing this way: "Oddly, we seem to be obsessed with the privacy rights of those who are a menace to society, rather than with insuring the safety of their innocent victims" (Taylor, 1989).

The manner in which mainstream media--especially television--depict gays, and

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[12]This article is a synopsis of the previous Sunday's *Face The Nation* broadcast, during which both Helms and William Bennett had been interviewed. The latter suggested keeping HIV-positive prisoners incarcerated beyond the end of their terms if they were deemed a threat to others.

PWAs, is of great concern to the organized gay community. Thus, when an episode of the TV program, *Midnight Caller*, was to feature a bisexual man who knowingly continued to infect sex partners of both genders with the AIDS virus, gay groups and AIDS advocacy groups were up in arms. They won from the network concessions in the form of on-air disclaimers [reminiscent of the compromise reached vis-a-vis the feature film, *Cruising*, several years earlier] to the effect that the protagonist was not a typical bisexual or a typical PWA:

> Nevertheless, when the completed episode was screened for the San Francisco AIDS groups last week, they remained dissatisfied. "We're still very disappointed that they haven't changed the basic premise of the script," Ms. [Pat] Christen [of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation] said. "Viewers are going to feel that people who are HIV positive are out to infect the innocent. I think that puts those who are infected at greater risk of discrimination and violence" (Farber, 1988).

B. Innocent= not knowingly infecting others

Another *New York Times* account of the *Midnight Caller* protests provides a convenient transition into the next group of articles. This time, the issue was framed more narrowly so as to suggest that the innocent people are not only those that the bisexual character would infect in the episode, but could also include the bisexual himself, had he only been ignorant of his own HIV status. This time the protesters' demands boiled down to a desire that "the subject of the story [b]e innocent of the knowledge that he is infected" (Gerard, 1988).

When California tax reform activist Paul Gann learned that he had contracted AIDS from a blood transfusion, he was quoted as saying that he was not angry at the blood donor, because "the person could have been perfectly innocent" (Mcquiston, 1989; Tax change, 1987). An interesting though perhaps more oblique reference occurs in a review of *Forgiving Typhoid Mary*, a dramatization of the story of "the cook who stubbornly refused to wash her hands." At one point the reviewer ponders the implications of the play for a modern audience:

> One thinks about victims who go on to create their own victims, about the ambiguity of the law when it comes to serial killers of the medical kind and, by extension, the moral and mortal consequences of innocent, or ignorant, spreaders of disease--from tuberculosis to AIDS (Interesting issues, 1991).

Finishing out the category of articles in which agents' intention vis-a-vis their HIV status determines also their status as innocent or guilty is an odd quote from a relatively early AIDS article in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* section. The thesis of the piece seems to be simply that medical science is up against a difficult challenge this time around. At one point the author indicates that it will be hard to contain the disease because it is spread through sexual behavior, and counseling abstinence is not a popular tack. She goes on:

> The groups most recently found to be at risk for AIDS present a particularly poignant problem. Innocent bystanders caught in the path of a new disease, they can make no behavioral decisions to minimize their risk: hemophiliacs cannot stop taking blood-clotting medication; surgery patients cannot stop getting transfusions; women cannot control the drug habits of their mates; babies cannot choose their mothers (Henig, 1983).

Innocence, for Henig, is attributed to anyone who "can't help it." It is interesting that she places the female mates of drug addicts in this camp, while not expanding the group membership to include anyone who gets AIDS through sexual relations. After all, none of us is able to control our sex partners' level or type of sexual experience, only our own.

III. The not yet jaded

My home edition of the *Oxford American Dictionary* tells me that to be innocent means more than to be personally not guilty of crime; it also can mean to be unacquainted with evil generally, to lack guile, even to be foolishly trusting. It is no surprise that many of the references unearthed in this project include such references. Thus, a character in a play about 3 PWAs is described as "an innocent" compared to his roommates at least as

much because he is only recently arrived in Manhattan from the Midwest as because of anything more directly relevant to his sexual behavior (Holden, 1990). A whole genre of AIDS literature is described as the lives of "innocent victims," the ones who "clutch comforting stuffed animals;" these folks are contrasted with the "queens in leather jackets kvetching about hospital room decor and disorderly orderlies" (Feinberg, 1991). Again, innocence is not sexual behavior or abstinence; it is a world view.

Ignorance of the complex, the evil, is surely part of innocence. Thus, a student at Stanford who supports the continued existence of "Ye Old Safe Sex Shoppe" on campus says that "a lot of people think ignorance is going to make you innocent but it doesn't" (Campus life, 1989). Then too, former Mayor Koch criticizes those (including Senator Helms) who would not permit federal funding for the kinds of explicitly candid safe sex educational materials produced by the Gay Men's Health Crisis organization, by reminding us that the target audience is not "innocents who'll be shocked by such literature" (Koch, 1987).

David Leavitt's extended discusson of his own coming out as a gay activist, alluded to earlier, describes his early awareness of AIDS as "an innocence [he] was lucky enough to maintain for almost five years," until more and more people within his own circle of acquaintance came down with the illness (Leavitt, 1989). When Rock Hudson was diagnosed, and his life story made into a TV movie, it was suggested that the truly "innocent bystanders" are those gullible enough "to believe that he was the only gay star in the Hollywood firmament" (O'Connor, 1990).

We already have seen that children are innocent. But the children who are or were the most innocent are those who belong to another day, "when television's influence was relatively benign," when "the lower grades were still full of innocent children" (Mirsky, 1987).[13] Similarly, when a Long Island community activist is quoted as contrasting the

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[13]The writer, a retired school teacher, was prompted to take to pen when she learned that the local school board was beginning a program of AIDS education even to kindegarten pupils. Friedberg (1989) also longs for a more innocent age, one when "condoms were mere wallet ornaments" for teenage boys, for the expiration dates always "came and went." Still, he cautions us not to engage too uncritically in our nostalgia:

> To say that times have changed would be too simple, for times always change. To say that we were innocent would be a tragic mistake. No generation is more innocent than the one that preceded it and no time, in and of itself, is better, or for that matter worse, than the time which came before it. Were

"innocent" (whom the law does not protect enough) with the prostitutes who have descended upon her community, one gets the sense that it is not the fact of sex, or even of commercial sex, that disturbs; rather it is the lack of decorum, the belief that this "element" belongs on Ninth Avenue, not in Central Islip (Mitchell, 1990).

An official of Philadelphia's Institute for Contemporary Art, singled out for possible punishment by Senator Helms because it had mounted the touring exhibition of the infamous Mapplethorpe photos, describes himself and his coworkers as "the innocents here" (Collins, 1989). The context makes clear that he refers to his innocence of how political and petty the art world can become, especially within the Beltway. And if art can be the subject of intense political scrutiny, so too can the most benign and even platitudinous calls for parental love and fairness. At least this was the lesson learned by Barbara Bush when her actions subjected the White House to political attack from the Republican right:

> The pressure stems from a seemingly innocent and unassailable sentiment in a letter Mrs. Bush wrote to a fellow parent. "I firmly believe," she said, "that we cannot tolerate discrimination against any individuals or groups in this country" (Bernstein, 1990).

The letter had been written to a member of the organization, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

IV. Conclusion

This first attempt at using the NEXIS database to identify the innocent victims of AIDS has identified some clear limitations of the research tool for this particular question, yet also some intriguing patterns.

There is a tradeoff in doing this kind of computer assisted research. On the one hand, NEXIS frees us from the tyranny of the indexer, in that we will uncover articles of interest that might not be filed in published indices under the subject heading, "AIDS." The review of the play in New Jersey about Typhoid Mary's life is a good example

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it so, then our parents and their parents would have spawned a more evil, a more guilty generation.

(Interesting issues, 1991). AIDS is mentioned only in passing. No indexer would list AIDS as one of the key terms via which researchers would be able to unearth the article. Yet the reference to AIDS and the innocence of not knowingly infecting others was surely relevant to the current inquiry.

This same power is also a weakness, in that the researcher must then painstakingly sift through the multitude of "hits" that turn out to be "false positives." In the current study, more than 900 articles were uncovered, yet only about 6% of these were of interest. Part of the problem no doubt stems from the fact that the word "AIDS" simply must become part of the NEXIS search strategy, yet computer databases do not know when the letters "A-I-D-S" refer to an epidemic and when they refer to one person (or nation) helping another.

Perhaps ironically, if the indexer's heavy hand were more consistently felt, part of the problem could be solved. For example, a large number of false hits were stories about "foreign aid," a bona fide subject heading. It would thus be possible to eliminate all such articles without calling them up by inserting a "and not SUBJECT [FOREIGN AID]" into the search strategy. Unfortunately, NEXIS does not produce its own subject headings--it must endure the tyranny of the sources' own indexers. And the vast majority of NEXIS sources do not provide subject headings at all. So the NEXIS researcher is not only permitted to free himself from the indexer, he is forced to.

Given the limitations of this first attempt, in which the sheer number of articles identified in the search precluded examining anything more than the *New York Times*, what can be said of that one media outlet's treatment of the "innocent" AIDS agents? It was surely no surprise to see that children were declared innocent, yet beyond that one finding, the pattern of results is not completely intuitive. This writer would not have guessed that so many references would include the sex partners, and not just the offspring, of drug addicts among the innocent. That the mere status of being currently HIV-negative would time and again earn one an attribution of innocence (as opposed to luck?) was a bit of a surprise. So too were the handful of citations that assigned innocence to HIV-positive individuals, as long as they did not knowingly infect others. AIDS activists who seek to produce progressive public policy would do well to tap into and reinforce the attitudes that

lead writers to refer to such persons as innocent.

Although it is beyond the scope of this first attempt at examining media coverage of AIDS "innocents," even a casual perusal of the citations provided herein would add two additional insights that might provide even more hope for AIDS activists. First, it is relevant to note that the vast majority of the "innocent" quotations provided here were just that--quotations. They were examples of the media describing what other people had said, rather than the media themselves telling us what to believe. Whether the person being quoted was Jeff Levi of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force or Senator Jesse Helms, the media were distancing themselves from others' attitudes.

Distancing is the key to the second, related insight. In many of the quotes offered here, especially in editorials, there is a clear hint of the ironic. The media are in effect telling us that those people out there may believe it makes sense to separate out the innocent and guilty, but we here in the newsroom think the whole process is a bit silly. Think especially of the TV reviewers who bemoaned prime time TV's fascination with the "innocent" victims, its running scared from gays and especially from drug addicts. The writers of these pieces clearly were not accepting the dichotomy at face value. And Anna Quindlen told us that "some people" (not she) believe that AIDS can "scoot across backyards and infect innocents taking the sun in their strollers." When Dr. Shenson (the Bronx Medical Center physician who travelled to the leper colony) came to realize that there were no "innocent" or "guilty" agents involved, only sick people to be treated, the insight was only worth sharing with us because he knows that there are still others, out there, who embrace the false labels.

Certainly the *New York Times* is not representative of all media. Still, one is left with the feeling that at least this media outlet, and perhaps the people whose stories it relates, have come to see the futility of seeking innocent and guilty parties here. Perhaps the simple wording of a banner stretched across Grand Street in Manhattan says it all.[14] The banner read simply, "All people with AIDS are innocent."

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[14]The banner almost prompted the cancellation of the AIDS related art exhibit at the Henry Street Settlement Center its crafters sought to publicize (Banner dispute over, 1989; Kimmelman, 1989b). The curator thought the message "too political" to be hanged within the exhibit building itself.

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